

As a Man Thinketh

ROBERT J. PARSONS

We read in Acts, chapter two, verse 17, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

I hesitate to mention today that I have had a dream, because doing so implies something about my age. I would rather report to you about a vision. Nevertheless, I had a dream about another talk I had to give a few months ago.

During the preparation for that talk, I awoke one morning from a dream. I had come to the pulpit in my dream to give my address. However, as I stood by the pulpit, vines began to grow all around the pulpit. They covered the pulpit like a large trellis. As I began to talk, the pulpit was faced backward. I was standing with my back to the congregation and was addressing my remarks to those sitting on the stand. As I stood there, facing backward, with vines all around me, the Orem High School marching band came into the chapel, marching up and down the aisles playing “76 Trombones.” Well, I am happy to be here this morning and to see that the pulpit is facing the right way, that the

plants on the stand have not grown, and that the marching band has not arrived.

Law of the Harvest

This spring my eight-year-old son and I went through the normal spring ritual of planting a garden. It is a delightful experience. We have learned two things over the years.

First, when we plant corn seeds, we receive corn back. When we plant radish seeds, we get radishes, carrots beget carrots, etc.

Second, we also learned that whatever we planted came back in abundance. When we planted zucchini, we got lots of zucchini.

These two principles are referred to as the law of the harvest. I am grateful to Brother Frederick W. Babbel for helping me understand this concept and realize the significance of this principle of the gospel. He authored a great book entitled “*To Him That Believeth.*”

Brother Babbel writes:

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Some people call this the Law of Cause and Effect; others call it the Law of Action and Reaction; still others call it the Law of Karma. References in the holy scriptures usually refer to it as the Law of the Harvest. This law can be named as the first law given during the creation of this earth and all form of life thereon. [See Genesis 1:11–12, 27–28.]

Everything multiplies “after his kind.” This includes plants, fruit trees, birds, fish, insects, animals, and human beings. . . .

As we apply this principle to daily life situations, we will discern that it also applies to our thoughts, feelings, and actions. . . .

Whatever you give to life will return to you — multiplied! This applies to our daily thoughts, feelings, and actions, be they positive or negative, uplifting or depressing. Hence, we need to make wise decisions.

Because of this principle, you can make for yourself a heaven or a hell on earth. You alone must bear the responsibility for the choices you make.

Who sets the standard of what forgiveness you may expect to receive? You do. (Matthew 6:14–15.) If you wish to be forgiven, you must first forgive others.

Who sets the standard of how you will be judged? You do. (Matthew 7:1–2.) Your own judgment by your Heavenly Father will be compassionate or harsh, depending upon what standard you have set in judging others.

The things you desire from life, you must first give to life. (Matthew 7:12.) What about acquiring the things you want? Like the seed planted in the ground, life can only return to you that which you first have given—with the added promise that everything you give must ultimately return to you multiplied. Perhaps that is why a sage of bygone years said a great truth, “Give to the world the best that you have and the best will come back to you.” And we might add, it will be multiplied!

If you feel that you are accident-prone, or a “worry wart,” or a “Why-does-this-always-happen-to-me” sort of person, you have become a victim

rather than a master of this law. . . . This law can work for you as well as against you.

Job and the Law of the Harvest

Brother Babbel continues:

In the Bible, Job is the epitome of a just and perfect man with many problems. At the beginning of his record it appears that he did not understand the implications of the Law of the Harvest.

As a young person in Sunday School, it used to bother me a great deal when our teacher related to us the story of Job and his excruciating suffering and pain. The explanation was always that we must be patient in our afflictions and sufferings, just like Job.

The rationalization was always that the devil wanted to test Job and that God gave him the privilege of literally wrecking this poor man’s life and everything he had built up. I could never accept that kind of a God, one who would compromise or “make a deal” with the devil. My experience has confirmed to me that he is a God of love, a God of kindness, and a God of patience. . . . I could not conceive of his deliberately permitting this type of suffering to happen to a perfect person.

After reading the biblical account many times, [I finally realized] that Job tells the real cause of all his disasters in the third chapter, twenty-fifth verse: “For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.” (Job 3:25.)

In other words, Job acknowledged that he was afraid, that he was a worrier. What would he do if he lost his health? What would he do if he lost his possessions? What would he do if he lost his business? What would he do if he lost his house? What would happen if he lost some of his loved ones? What would happen if he lost his entire family? What would happen if his closest friends turned against him? Such thoughts, apparently, preyed on him continually.

The law is that the things which we think and the things which we harbor generate our feelings, and these feelings result in our acts which produce

the harvest. For “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7.) “For as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7.)

Since Job sowed seeds of worry, doubt, and fear, the devil had access to him and the harvest was calamitous. He lost everything but his faith in the Lord.

The things that Job was admittedly so much concerned about, came to pass. They became so unbearable that he wished that he had never been born, that he had been hidden under the greatest mountain chain so that not even God could find him or have any recollection of his existence.

But with all his problems and troubles, he did not deny God. Finally the Lord came to him and said, in effect, “Job, wake up and be a man. Don’t you recall how happy you were in the morn of creation and how eagerly you looked forward to the wonderful opportunity of coming to this earth and partaking of the beauties here? Now stop whining and be a man. Gird up your loins and speak as if thou hast understanding.”

When Job perceived the message and realized that he had sown the seeds of his own problems and undoing, he took on new courage. (Job 42.) He then departed from fear and desired the things which are of God. He was eager to follow the guidelines that the Lord had given him. Note how the Law of the Harvest began to work for his benefit when he changed his attitude.

The scriptures reveal that when Job realized the cause of his dilemma and asked the Lord’s forgiveness, his blessings were multiplied abundantly; he was rewarded two-fold in family, in friends, in flocks and herds, in health, and in all that makes for an abundant life. [Frederick W. Babbel, “To Him That Believeth” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), pp. 25–29]

What are some of the seeds that we may plant in our lives? The seeds of the adversary include the following:

Faultfinding (criticism)
Discord (quarrel)

Contention (argument)
Pride (dispute)
Envy
Discouragement
Disbelief (doubt)
Fear (worry, anxiety)
Anger
Hate

But the seeds of our Father in Heaven would have us plant are these:

Love
Rejoicing (praise)
Thankfulness (gratitude)
Joy
Faith
Forgiveness
Patience (longsuffering)
Humility (meekness)
Harmony
Peace
Temperance
Goodness
Gentleness
[Babbel, p. 33]

Today I would like to add three additional seeds to this impressive and inspired list. First, that of obedience; second, repentance; and last, what I call the telephone parable, reach out and touch someone.

Obedience

An illustration of the blessings that one receives through obedience is given by this story of Abraham Smoot. As you know, the administration building bears his name.

After the hardships of Ohio, Missouri, and Nauvoo, Abraham Smoot finally was able to settle down in Salt Lake City, build comfortable accommodations for his family, and become mayor of the city. Brigham asked Brother Smoot to come to Provo and be the stake president. The Brigham Young Academy was not

Church funded and was the personal responsibility of the stake president. Brother Smoot balked at the idea. “Brother Brigham, I’ve put my family through so much. I have done all I was asked to do. Now, finally, I have some of the comforts of life, I have a position of respect, and I am able to provide for my family. It is too much to ask. I will not go to Provo.”

At that, Brigham Young, the Lion of the Lord, is reputed to have said, “Brother Smoot, you will go to Provo, or you will go to ——!” Brother Smoot went to Provo. By the time he died, Abraham O. Smoot was deeply in debt from keeping the university functioning. His homes were mortgaged and an auction was held to settle the debts.

Jesse Knight showed up at the sale and happened to be the highest bidder on every one of the Smoot homes. He took the deeds and signed one over to each of the wives of Abraham Smoot living in the homes.

Brother Smoot demonstrated to us that by being obedient we harvest eternal blessings which are far more important than the material wealth of this life.

Repentance

The second seed that I would like you to plant in your life is that of repentance. I have a daughter who runs the 100-meter hurdles for Orem High School. There are 10 hurdles that she must jump in the race. The race takes about 16 seconds. In fact, some girls have run the 100-meter hurdles in 14.5 seconds. One of her goals has always been to finish the race. This young daughter has worked hard, put in many hours of practice, and has been taught correct principles in how to run hurdles. She has developed faith in herself, and she has been successful in being one of the top hurdlers in the state of Utah.

The other day I looked at the hurdles from the starting point, and it is quite an awesome sight to see those ten hurdles in straight and narrow lanes. It reminded me that eternal life is

our destination, and straight and narrow is the way.

In one recent meet, my daughter hit the first hurdle, knocking her into the other lane. This disqualified her from the race. They call it being DQ’d. We, too, have hurdles in our way. It may be the hurdle of sin, of transgression, of reluctance, of procrastination, of pride, or of the lack of faith. We, too, have had experience, teachings, hard work, and faith. Sometimes in our life we hit hurdles and may be temporarily DQ’d. Unlike my daughter, however, the race is not over for us. Repentance allows us to continue.

The Savior provided for us that process of repentance. Jesus taught us the path. He personally walked that path and commanded us to follow him and do the things that he had done. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way . . . that leadeth to salvation (see Matthew 7:14, D&C 132:22).

Jesus walked the path of disappointment. Remember in Luke 13:34 he said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children . . ., and ye would not!”

Jesus also walked the path of obedience. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

Jesus walked the path of service. “Love thy neighbor . . .” (see Luke 10:27). Jesus walked the path of prayer and taught us whom we should pray to—our Father in Heaven (Luke 11:2). And to be obedient, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). And finally he taught us to pray for others. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

So as we move along the narrow path, it is important that we follow the Savior and his example. If we are temporarily DQ’d, then repentance allows us to continue on and to be successful in our lives.

Human Touch

The last seed I would like to plant in your life is for you to understand the importance of the human touch. Again, the Savior provided us with the proper example. “And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them” (Matthew 8:15). “Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it” (Matthew 9:29, 30). “And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:51). “And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had touched them all, and spake unto them as he touched them” (3 Nephi 18:36).

In all of these cases, the Savior was telling us that it is important to express feeling through the human touch. We visualize that when we see a new baby with its mother or when we see an engaged couple holding hands or a father and son wrestling on the living room floor. President Holland is a touch person. President Kimball also emulates that trait. Other examples of the human touch include a handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug. “A hug says it all and makes both the hugger and the huggee feel terrific” (*Family Circle*, 28 April 1981, p. 79). Let me identify a few occasions where giving a hug would be appropriate:

Your kids say, “Wow! Leftovers!”

Your father insists, “I like to wallpaper ceilings.”

You change your hair color and your husband not only notices, he whistles.

Your seven-year-old turns off the TV and says, “I just feel like reading a book.”

Your thirteen-year-old daughter sits down to write a thank-you note—with no prompting.

You find your husband—who started out to clean the attic—dreamily looking at your old wedding album.

Your husband looks at the ruined fender, then at you, and asks, “Are you sure you’re all right?”

Your son comes home from college with a haircut.

Your teenage son borrows the car and returns it with a full tank.

Your teenage daughter calls at midnight to say the party’s gotten out of hand, and would you come to pick her up?

Your two-year-old asks you to marry her.

Your husband says “I’m sorry” even though you know it’s just as much your fault.

The puppy is trained at last.

Your husband does the dishes—and the pots.

Your nine-year-old’s Little League team loses 3-2 in an extra inning.

[Mary Mobler, “Fifty Reasons to Give a Hug,” *Family Circle*, 28 April 1981, p. 79]

The human touch conveys so many emotions.

We recently had a family home evening where the opposite of this principle was taught. Each of us had a tag on a piece of string around our necks. During the day, when any one of us said anything negative to another, we would tear a little of that person’s tag, indicating that what the offender had done was to give negative rather than positive reinforcement.

So often we do the opposite of what the Savior has taught by tearing each other’s tags. For example, when I say to my children, “Why do you do those dumb things?” “You can’t do that,” “Don’t be silly,” or “You dummy,” I convey a negative connotation to my children. That is, I “tear their tags.”

Each morning, as I would awaken my eight-year-old son, I would say, “Look in the mirror and see the monkey.” And then he would stop at the landing, and again I would say, “Look in the mirror and see the monkey.” And finally, in the bathroom, I would tear his tag again by saying, “Look at the monkey in

the mirror.” I didn’t realize that I was “tearing his tag” until one day at family prayer he said, “Please, Father in Heaven, make it so my Daddy doesn’t call me a monkey anymore.” Now when we look in the mirror I say, “Look at that neat kid with his handsome father.” How often do we tear each other’s tags rather than follow the example of lifting through the human touch?

My older son, who is currently serving a mission, told me of an experience he had while he worked as a disc jockey for K-96. He worked the two till six a.m. shift. One evening he received a phone call from a BYU coed who was not a member of the Church. He could sense that she was distraught and very emotional. She wanted to know the phone number of the Crisis Center since she said, “I am contemplating suicide.”

It seems that her roommates had never invited her to church meetings or activities. They had meant well by honoring her own beliefs, but in the process had forgotten to include her, had forgotten to reach out and touch her. They had not been harsh or mean, but, at the same time, their “neutral” position had not built or sustained a relationship. She felt so alone and unloved.

He was able to keep her on the telephone, telling her about the gospel and about the Savior, only occasionally breaking off to do the necessary station identification. As the sun started to peek over Timpanogos, only then was she able to bring her emotions under control. His two-hour conversation helped put her life into perspective. He had reached out and touched her.

How many young people are there who have their tags torn, unable really to experience the joy that comes from the human touch? Children seem to understand this concept so much better than those of us who are called adults.

My wife teaches second grade at Rock Canyon School. One of her students this year

was somewhat of an outcast. He was different. He had a difficult time writing. He had a difficult time expressing his emotions.

The class members, under my wife’s tutelage, learned that they could help him. She would use pats on the back and hugs as positive reinforcement. Whenever this young man achieved, the entire class would applaud.

It seems that children are always able to respond openly and honestly in terms of their feelings. I asked my young son one time if he was going to become an Eagle like his brother. After much thought he replied, “Nope, I think I’d rather be a duck.” One young second grade student responded the following way when asked to name the four seasons: “Duck, deer, fishing, pheasant.” He received full credit since his answer conveyed a loving relationship with a committed father.

Let me further illustrate this caring concept with the following stories.

Elaine and Dave arrived at the hotel exhausted. Elaine had made all the arrangements for the room and the concert they planned to attend, and she let Dave know about it all the way, telling him how hard she’d worked to coordinate everything.

Then—horrors!—they walked up to the desk and the hotel manager told them they had no reservations. He pulled out the letter Elaine had written and proved he was right.

“I had put down the wrong dates,” she groaned. “And having been so full of myself, I thought for sure Dave would give it to me.”

What Dave gave her instead was a hug. “Honey,” he said, “don’t worry. We’ll find something else.” It dawned on Elaine that she had married the kind of person who never hits you when you’re down. “I think of that whenever I start complaining to myself about all that Dave isn’t. It reminds me that I’ve picked the right person.”

Soon after their sixth anniversary, . . . Angi and David’s home burned to the ground. Angi’s first act,

when they were allowed to hunt through the blackened remains, was to search for their very precious photograph albums. And when she went to tell David the news that the pictures indeed had survived, she found him kneeling in ashes to rescue, and carefully place in a box, some charred, folded pieces of paper — their courtship love letters.

“As I watched David there in the ashes,” she [says], “I was overcome with the certainty that we were meant for one another. There, in the face of our greatest tragedy, our first thoughts were not of our material loss but of the potential loss of these precious parts of ourselves and of our life together. As I knelt to help him with the letters, I was certain that we hadn’t lost anything that mattered after all.” [Judith Viorst, “True Love Stories,” Redbook, February 1982, p. 38]

We have developed a game that we play in our home called “Touched You Last.” Most nights, as we tuck the children in bed, we play this fun game. One night, after we all had been in bed for a few minutes and the lights were out, my daughter got out of her bed and in the dark crawled quietly on her hands and knees from her room down the hall into our room. She crawled to my side of the bed, reached up and said, “Touched you last.” I want you to know that my heart is okay.

Last spring, our golden retriever, Duchess, had seven brand-new puppies. One day, when the puppies were about five weeks old, I brought the puppies to the Tanner Building so the secretaries could see them.

While I was here on campus, I took them out on the east side of the Tanner Building and let them run around on the patio area which leads down to Helaman Halls. It was a neat experience to watch these mature, scholarly students as they would stop to play with the puppies. Everyone who stopped got down on their hands and knees and played with the puppies, allowing the little dogs to kiss them.

It was great to see these college students “reach out and touch” and extend love to little warm puppies. Surely the Peanuts character, Charlie Brown, was right when he said, “Happiness is a warm puppy.”

Today I have told you that whatever a person sows, so shall he or she reap. This is the law of the harvest. Also, I’ve said that we have within our grasp the full potential for our own happiness. It is really up to us. As we are obedient to the principles of the gospel and as we put our lives in order, through repentance, we can then “reach out and touch someone.”

Finally, let me end with a short story written by one of my wife’s students. The story illustrates the seed and essence of happiness.

If I found some gold and jewels, I would share with my family. I would buy my mom a new car, some clothes, and a new house. My sister some clothes. And a Cabbage Patch for Jane, my sister. Now my brother some new clothes, a car for Jim. For Jack which he thinks he is the king, because he gets everything he wants, I would get him some clothes. Now for my dad anything he wants. My grandma and grandpa I would give them some money. And what do I get! Do you think I need some money? You do, oh! I don’t think so. Because I shared with my family and it made me happy. And so I was the richest in the world.

May we plant in our lives the seed of obedience to the gospel principles, the seed of repentance, and the seed of the human touch so that our harvest is one of happiness and joy. My brothers and sisters, I bear testimony to you of the divinity of the Savior Jesus Christ. As we follow his example we will secure joy and harvest the happiness we all so desire. This I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.